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Show Me Health

Author: Richard Smith

## Keeping Food Safe During an Emergency

Did you know that a flood, fire, natural disaster, or the loss of power from high winds or lightning during a thunderstorm could jeopardize the safety of your food? Knowing how to determine if food is safe and how to keep food safe will help minimize the potential loss of food and reduce the risk of foodborne illness. This fact sheet will help you make the right decisions for keeping your family safe during an emergency.

### **Keeping Food Safe in an Emergency**

**Use A Thermometer:** Always keep meat, poultry, fish, and eggs refrigerated at or below 41 °F and frozen food at or below 0 °F. This may be difficult when the power is out.

**Keep the Door Closed!** Keep the refrigerator and freezer doors closed as much as possible to maintain the cold temperature. The refrigerator will keep food safely cold for about 4 hours if it is unopened. A full freezer will hold the temperature for approximately 48 hours (24 hours if it is half full) if the door remains closed. Obtain dry or block ice to keep your refrigerator as cold as possible if the power is going to be out for a prolonged period of time. Fifty pounds of dry ice should hold an 18-cubic foot full freezer for 2 days. Plan ahead and know where dry ice and block ice can be purchased.

**Be Prepared.** Keep items on hand that don't require refrigeration and can be eaten cold or heated on the outdoor grill. Shelf-stable food, boxed or canned milk, water, and canned goods should be part of a planned emergency food supply. Make sure you have ready-to-use baby formula for infants and pet food. Remember to use these items and replace them from time to time. Be sure to keep a hand-held can opener for an emergency.

**Plan Ahead.** Consider what you can do ahead of time to store your food safely in an emergency. If you live in a location that could be affected by a flood, place your food storage on shelves that will be safely out of the way of contaminated water. Coolers are a great help for keeping food cold if the power will be out for more than 4 hours—have a couple on hand along with frozen gel packs. When your freezer is not full, keep items close together—this helps the food stay cold longer.

**Again, Use A Thermometer!** Digital, dial, or instant-read food thermometers and appliance thermometers will help you know if the food is at safe temperatures. Keep appliance thermometers in the refrigerator and freezer at all times. When the power is out, an appliance thermometer will always indicate the temperature in the refrigerator and freezer no matter how long the power has been out. The refrigerator temperature should be 41 °F or below; the freezer, 0 °F or lower. If you're not sure a particular food is cold enough, take its temperature with a food thermometer. You can purchase a food thermometer at most discount stores, and many grocery stores.

**Don't Taste Test.** Never taste a food to determine its safety. Some foods may look and smell fine, but if they've been at room temperature longer than two hours, bacteria able to cause food borne illness can begin to multiply very rapidly. Some type will produce toxins, which are not destroyed by cooking and can possibly cause illness.

For more information for consumers about food safety, including a temperature chart for food safety after a power outage, visit:

<http://www.dhss.mo.gov/FoodSafety/Consumers.html>

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